

Transforming Beliefs at Meta-Levels

Beliefs (#3)

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

Transforming Toxic and Limiting Beliefs

With this understanding of the role, functioning, nature, and structure of beliefs, we can now identify those that poison and sabotage us and construct beliefs that will empower and enhance life. What totally empowering belief would you like to get stuck in your head as a frame-of-mind to operate from?

Beliefs Change Pattern

- 1) Think about some old belief that you, once upon a time, believed, but that you no longer believe. Did you once believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, that "chocolate is the most wonderful thing in the whole world," etc.? Notice how you represent your "old belief no longer believed." How do you know that you no longer believe it?
- 2) Think about a time when you did believe the idea and allow yourself to go back, in your mind, to a specific time and a place when you did fully and completely believe that belief. As you situate yourself back in that experience, notice how you represent it. Get your "I really believe in this!" representation.
- 3) Now quickly move through time up to the present and notice that old belief changing. How did that come to occur? When you have seen the entire process, reorient yourself back into the present moment as you take a moment to specify the change factors.

Debriefing

As beliefs grow and solidify by the focusing of consciousness so that one has fewer questions and fewer doubts, and one feels sure. Then one feels convinced. So the reverse happens when we experience the undoing of a belief. We go through those stages in reverse. First we start having some questions. We may experience some confusion, and then some doubts, and so we become a little unsure and then more unsure.

When a thought grows up into a belief, our mind closes more and more around the idea so that it allows less and less "openness" to other ideas. Conversely, when a belief moves backward into a thought, the mind opens up more and more to other thoughts. It loosens its hold on just one thought. Rather than more focus, consciousness expands and diffuses.

When we experience a strong, intense, categorical belief, we have a thought or learning to which we say emphatically and without a shadow of a doubt, "Yes!" "Of Course!" "Without Question!" When we undo that belief so that we can weaken it and begin to replace it with something more enhancing, we start saying about that thought, "I wonder..." "What about this other idea...?" "What about these other factors...?" Then, when we get to the place of disbelief, we definitely, emphatically and categorically say "No, of course not!" "Ridiculous!" "No way!" to that thought.

Preparation Work for Belief Change

- 1) Identify your representations of doubt. Think about something you doubt, something about which you really don't know much and toward which you have lots of questions. How do you represent a doubt? (By the way, a doubt does not describe the opposite of a belief. A doubt (especially a strong doubt) operates as a belief that something "is not so.")
- 2) Identify your representation for disbelief. Think of something that you definitely do not believe. What do you not believe in? How do you represent it?

about things in a completely different way? Get your representations of that sudden belief change.

If not, then creatively imagine someone like Saul on the Damascus Road. Imagine him suddenly struck by lightning and experiencing a total conversion thereby turning him into the apostle Paul. It doesn't matter whether you believe the story or not, only that you can create the representations and feel of "a sudden belief change."

5) Identify your representation of your museum of old beliefs. Think about something that you once believed, but no longer believe. If you think of this as a mental museum where you have stored those old beliefs, you can appreciate them as "old" beliefs. How do you represent such?

5) Identify your representation of openness. Think of a time and place where, mentally-emotionally, you thought and felt in a very open, receptive, curious, and playful way.

Debriefing

Your doubt representations access your skill and state of questioning: calling into question, wondering, opening the mind to new and different information, etc. Here you experience thoughtfulness, openness of mind, curiosity, wonderment, unsureness. Here you will probably have a broader perspective with some formulations but less definition, less specifics, much "fusing" together (con-fusion) of thoughts and feelings about the subject.

In your disbelief experience, you undoubtedly have a meta-level experience of going above some thought or idea and saying a strong "No!" to it. Here, you probably have other thoughts and beliefs that get in the way of saying "Yes" to it. Here you will have specific sights, sounds, and sensations that give you clarity of what you do believe in contradistinction to your not-belief.

In your unsure experiences, you probably have two (or more) sets of representations vying for attention so that internally you keep going back and forth, back and forth between the representations. Maybe this... not maybe this... no... Do you go back and forth laterally (right to left) or vertically (up and down) or from back to front?

With your sudden belief change, your experience of a sudden, shocking, unexpected event, fact, or idea will probably induce a floating feeling of un-reality, a sense of not having a good grasp on reality, a lightness, even a dizziness. One's thoughts-emotions feel as if the very foundation of life has crumbled beneath the feet. Sometimes after a natural disaster (tornado, flood, etc.), or a man-made disaster (bombing, terrorism) we see people "in a daze," unsure, dissociated, unable to cope, saying, "I can't believe..."

Your museum of old beliefs representations gives you the ability to store away in a safe place old beliefs that have outlived their usefulness without just outright trashing them. Here you might feel amused about such old fashion, non-relevant, and musty beliefs. Or you might appreciate the value they once offered you. Or you might enjoy their knowing how you have outgrown them.

Mapping Over The Transformation

Sometimes we can simply map over from belief to unsure and then to doubt. As an experiment, play with this and see if it works sufficiently to transform your limiting belief. Pick out some limiting, sabotaging, and toxic belief that you would like to change.

Take your representation of the belief (typically, a sight or sound--close, in color, associated, bright, clear, etc.) and code it with your codings for unsure (two sights and sounds, one to the right, the other to the left, one up and bright, the other down to the right and more of a sensation, etc.). Listen to your internal voice saying "Yes" to it, and "No" to it, and then "I just don't know." Stay in the unsure experience until you really loosen up your sense of the belief and now you feel that you just don't know anymore.

Now map over into doubt. Use your representations for doubt to re-code the old limiting belief. As you do let other ideas begin to get in the way of the old belief so that your doubt of the old belief grows stronger.

To use the meta-states model to transform an old belief that doesn't serve you well or that creates some kind of sabotage or unbalance in life--do the following.

- 1) Identify your representation of the belief. How do you code it and what internal representations drive it?
- 2) Transform your "Yes!" As you notice how you sometimes say "Yes" to that belief, begin to say that "Yes" in a questioning tone of voice. Use a doubting and unsure voice, weak in volume, small in expression... increase the doubt. Keep increasing the unsureness until your questioning questions it so much that it feels sure of its doubt. Experience fully your sureness of this doubt about the belief. "Now I feel sure of my doubt." As you do this, notice where (the location) you store this doubt.
- 3) Bring in the new empowering belief that you would really like to believe. Represent it fully and clearly... appreciating how it will make life so much better, command your neurology in an exciting way, and generate a self-fulfilling prophecy that you'd love to suffer... Again, notice where you locate this belief.
- 4) "Yes!" your new belief. Now begin to say "Yes!" to this new enhancing belief. Make your internal voice of "Yes!" strong and firm, then make it firmer, louder, closer, etc. Use your auditory submodalities that really make it compelling for you... then double it... until you feel more and sure about the "Yes!"
- 5) Future pace. Now imagine, fully and completely moving out into life tomorrow with the confidence of "Yes!" about that enhancing belief... see and hear and feel yourself orienting yourself in the world with it... at work, at home, in all the contexts of importance to you...

Beliefs as Languaged Constructions

Because a meta-level phenomenon that do not refer to "real" things in the world, but to mental constructs of ideas, beliefs need language. We therefore inevitably code our beliefs primarily linguistically. Now after you have done the linguistic work of coding a belief, you may use a symbol to symbolize that belief (a pair of scales to symbolize your concepts and beliefs about "justice"). But looking at a pair of scales or any other icon alone does not and cannot contain all of the rich linguistic ideas involved in that idea. We need words and language to perform this task.

Notice then the language you use to represent your beliefs. In NLP, the meta-model offers these distinctions about beliefs.

Complex Equivalence Beliefs. "This external behavior, action, response, event, entity, etc. equals or means this internal significance." We write this in the formula format: EB = IS. "Failing in that business (EB) means I'm just don't have any business sense (IS)."

Cause-Effect Beliefs. We frame some event as the cause of some effect. Often we do so in an ill-formed way. "Having a painful childhood explains why I've had, and will have, dysfunctional relationships." "The lecturing way he comes across when he gives me a task to do makes me feel like a child."

Mind-Reading Beliefs. We frame our ideas about certain internal states and intentions of others without checking with them, thus mind-reading or second-guessing them. "When she looks at me like that (EB), it means she's upset with me (IS)."

The Linguistic Belief Change Pattern

- 1) Write out an effective and compelling language statement of an enhancing belief that would enrich your lie.
 - * "I can trust people and stay alert to signals about who may or may not behave in a trustworthy way."
 - * "I can graciously welcome and appreciate my fallibility, take it into account, and treat myself in a kinder/gentler way when I mess up. I will view mistakes as a sign of my humanity, not my depravity!"

drives them, notice the power and elegance of the following statements. These statements provides a pathway whereby you can conversationally invite belief changes in others--without the need to do "therapy" on them!

Suppose you hear someone say, "I can't believe that..."? You know that you have a three-leveled structure: "can't-ness" (a state of thinking-and-feeling of impossibility) about the belief statement about some primary state. So "I can't believe that..." translates to (creates the gestalt of), "I doubt that I have the ability to accept your idea."

I like to respond to, "I can't believe that...." with some of the following. (1) "How surprised would you feel if you discovered that this belief, 'People can't change' (or any negative belief) suddenly changed and you found yourself unable to believe it anymore?" (2) "Yes, I know that you can't believe this, and I wonder what it would feel like if you began to, in just a little way, doubted that... because if you began to have some questions about your inability to entertain such thoughts, you might find yourself at least entertaining the possibility of believing it, can't you, now?"

(3) "Would you like to become open to doubting that that idea contains the whole story?"

(4) "Do you have even the slightest doubt about that? .. Yes, a little doubt...? A little doubt that you can allow to grow and double and become stronger and strong as the days pass... so that when you think about five years from now and turn around and look back to this realizing that your belief has changed..."

Conclusion

Like it or not we inevitably use beliefs to navigate our way through life. Problematically, we can develop unenhancing beliefs about beliefs like the idea that "You're stuck with your beliefs!" "It's sacrilegious to change your beliefs." "People can't change their basic beliefs." Of course, such limiting beliefs only lock in our beliefs so that we close our minds to new information and new possibilities. A belief about a belief does this! So believe... but avoid believing in your belief!

Would you like to become more open to changing all of your limiting and self-sabotaging beliefs? How much would you give to develop the belief changing skills so that whenever you find an old toxic belief that limits your effectiveness in business, personal relationships, your own personal empowerment, etc., you can change it quickly and immediately and replace it with a positive mental map that will take you to more enjoyable places?

References:

- Bandler, Richard. (1982). Reframing: NLP & the transformation of meaning. Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications.
- Dilts, R.B. (1991). Changing beliefs systems with NLP. Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications.